



DEMOGRAPHIC STATUS AND POSITION OF BHUTIA'S IN SIKKIM

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ABSTRACT

The study of demographic pattern of any society is important as it allows us to understand the nature in which our population changes over time and leaves its impact in the changing socio-economic and political scenario. Sikkimese society can be described as multi-ethnic segmented society which is an attribute of tribal social formation and not a multi-caste hierarchical society found in other parts of India. Historically, Sikkim was predominantly ruled by the Bhutia's, migrated from Tibet since 13th century. With time, the status and position of Bhutia's in Sikkim underwent great changes. The paper is an attempt to study the demographic status of Bhutia's in Sikkim. As per the census record Bhutia's were the largest community in Sikkim in early years. However, consequent changes occurred with the increase of migrated population in Sikkim, which became threat to the long existing position of Bhutia's as the dominant community. The paper relies on the available population census records for studying the demographic profile of communities in Sikkim. It is seen that the population of Sikkim has consistently increased. It is found out that there has been not much progress in Bhutia population as compared to population of the state.

KEY WORDS: Sikkim, Bhutia, Population, Status, Position, Change.

Sikkim, a multiethnic state is officially composed of twenty different communities as per the 2011 census. Basically Sikkim has three ethnic communities; Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali. There is a consensus that Lepchas are the original population of Sikkim. The Limboo, the Mangar and the Bhutia are the other communities who have come to Sikkim quite early in the Middle Ages (Namgyal and Dolma, 1908). Initially Bhutia's had the absolute majority of population in Sikkim. Like any other society Sikkim also has witnessed changes in the population structure. Gradually Sikkim witnessed change in the demographic profile with the influx of the Nepali community. The bulk of the population belonging to the Nepali community from other parts of India especially from west Bengal, Assam (India) and Nepal migrated and settled in Sikkim during the late and early 20th centuries. The process of migration further got accelerated after Sikkim became the protectorate of the British in 1861. This migration of population, particularly Nepalese led Sikkim into the road of population diversity.

It is understood from the historical prospective that the settlement of Bhutia's in Sikkim basically began in the 15th and the 16th century. According to Maharaja Thutop Namgyal and Maharani Yeshey Dolma Namgyal (1908), the migration of Bhutia's took place in various forms and ways. Since the establishment of Chogyal rule (Nangyal dynasty) in 1642, the population of Bhutia's gradually expanded in Sikkim. The migration was also seen during the Chinese influence of Tibet and the escape of Tibet King cum religious head, His Holiness Dalai Lama into India.

Availability of limited source on the early demographic record of ethnic communities of Sikkim limits the study on the demographic profile of Sikkim. Only after 1888 when Sikkim came under British Superintendency, the population census was conducted by the British political officer in Sikkim. Before 1975, the population figures of the ethnic communities in Sikkim have also been drawn from Limboo chronicles and Lepcha folklores and legends. The Tibetans texts and traditions have also been the source for the record of ethnic population distribution in the early history of Sikkim.

According to Rishley, the first population census of Sikkim was held in 1891. It was the first ethnic wise population census of Sikkim. It shows that there existed about fourteen communities. The 1891 census gave rough population estimate of 30,458. With regard to population ratio the Lepchas stands at the top followed by Bhutia's, Limboo's, Gurung, Tamang's and others.

The first population census conducted in 1891 also reveals that Lepchas constituted the highest numbers of population with total 5762 persons. The male population included 2362 persons, females included 2399 persons and 1001 were children. Bhutia's were the second highest with total of 4804 persons, where the male population was 1966, 1960 were female population and 968 were children. The next highest population after Bhutia's were the Limboos constituting of total population of 3356, where male population comprised of total 1255 persons, female population included 1159 persons and 943 children.

The available data presents that even prior to the census of 1891, in Sikkim there existed a multi-cultural society. Apart from the Lepchas and the Bhutia's the other communities like Limboo, Tamang, Rai, Gurung, Khambu, Brahman

(Sharma), Chettri, Kami, Mangar, Newar and others lived in Sikkim. This indicates that the existence of other communities side by side has always been a threat to Bhutia paramountcy in Sikkim.

The demographic pattern underwent a great change with the Nepalese migration into Sikkim. The settlement of the Nepalese into Sikkim not only brought difference in the demographic profile but also created a new socio cultural life as the majority of the migrated Nepalese professed Hinduism.

Within a short span of time the Nepalese as a whole became the largest community in Sikkim, outnumbering both the Lepchas and the Bhutia's. However, in political and administrative management of the country, the migrated group of people remained minor players till the merger of Sikkim took place in 1975.

Considering Nepalese as an industrious people they were welcomed by the Chogyal of Sikkim. Nepalese were engaged in extending the settlements by clearing the forests and increasing agricultural cultivation. They introduced new methods of agriculture including the terraced farming. The migration of Nepalese helped Sikkim in the attainment of development and prosperity in the agricultural and economic fields.

Along with the Bhutia's, Lepchas and Nepalese, small and distinct group known as the Tsongs originally settlers from the Tsang-po valley in Tibet, now the Limbuwana district of Nepal, which was at one time a part of Sikkim, dispersed and settled down in various parts of Sikkim. Among early settlers of Sikkim, an important minority was that of Sikkim Indians. As this group were traders and businessmen, they exercised economic influence to a large extent. The Indians basically were from Rajasthan, Punjab, UP, Bihar and Bengal and are still the important community in Sikkim (Raizada, 2012, page 9).

In Sikkim, the Lepchas and Bhutia's were the most dominant group in Sikkim till the late 18th and the beginning of the 19th century.

The first ever captured record of the Bhutia Population in Sikkim was in 1840. The Bhutia's were approximately 1995 in 1840 which has increased to 69598 in 2011. It is evident from the table below that the numbers of Bhutia's increased in every census. However, decline in the growth of Bhutia population has been noticed in 2011 census.

Table 1. Bhutia Population in Sikkim from 1840-1991

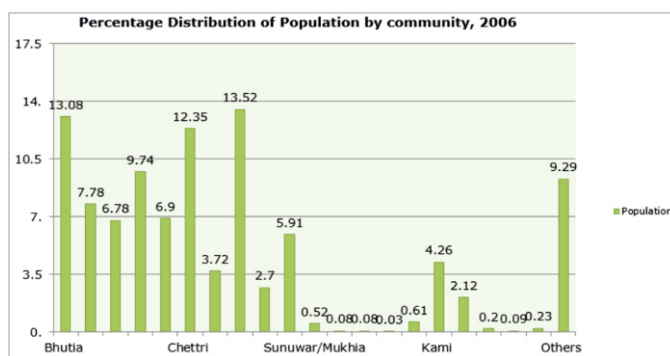
Year	Bhutias in Sikkim
1840	1995
1891	4894
1909	6000
1911	10411
1921	9639
1931	11070
1951	15626

1961	36577
1971	36760
1981	21548
1991	65033
2001	70308
2011	69598

Source: SK Gurung, 2012.

As per the findings of Directorate of Economic, Social and monitoring and Evaluation (DESME) 2006, the entire population is distributed amongst 20 communities in the state. Rai from the Nepali community has the highest number of household which stands at 15430 households, followed by Bhutia's with 14769 households, Chettri (from Nepali Community with 13509 households and then by Limbo's with 10672 households.

Fig.1 Community wise Percentage of distribution of Population in Sikkim, 2006



Source: DESME: State Socio Economic Census, Govt. of Sikkim, 2006

Table 3. Percentage distribution of Bhutia population by age group in Sikkim, 2006																	
Population	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-14	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75 Above	Not reported
13.08	10.92	11.59	12.63	12.94	12.88	13.60	14.04	14.27	13.51	13.72	13.94	13.81	15.14	15.45	15.77	16.96	15.15
Source: DESME, State socio-economic status census, 2006																	

Source: DESME, State socio-economic status census, 2006

Bhutia's comprise of total 13.08% out of the total population in the state. It is evident that within the age group 60 and above have higher population than the lower ages. The highest percentage of population is seen within the age group of 75 and above. It shows that the birth rate within this community is low as compared to death rate.

The census, 2011 gives the impression that the Bhutia population has decreased over the decade. It enumerates that total Bhutia population is 69598 as against 70308 in 2001. According to the population census of 2011, the highest number of Bhutia's are concentrated in the east district with 34043 persons, followed by south district with 13802 persons, west with 13779 persons and north district is the least Bhutia populated district with only 7971 persons.

Table.4 District wise distribution of Bhutia Population in Sikkim, 2011

District	Total population	Rural		Urban	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Sikkim	69598	26127	24729	9097	9645
North	7971	4082	3889	815	398
South	13805	7330	6475	813	864
West	13779	6433	6526	407	413
East	34043	9493	9120	7479	7951

Source: Census of India, 2011

The population figure shows that in all the districts higher number of Bhutia population lives in rural areas. While making a comparative study between male and female population, the number of male population is higher than the female in rural areas. Only in west district female is slightly higher than the male population. The urban statistics show that in east, south and west district the female population has outnumbered the male population. The district where male population is higher in urban areas is the north district. In total, the female Bhutia population living in the urban areas is 9645 and that of male is 9097. At present the Bhutia population stands at 11.39% of the total population in Sikkim. In the wake of time, the population of Sikkim has consistently increased. Sikkim witnesses an increase of 1.23 % in its population on yearly basis. The population

Though the rule of Bhutia's in Sikkim came to an end 42 years back, still they have been able to maintain their position to second largest community after Rai.

The paper has also extended to study district wise distribution of Bhutia Community in the state. It is noted that the East district comprises of the highest number, followed by south district, north district and then west district. Table below gives the picture of district wise distribution of Bhutia's in the state in 2006.

Table. 2 District wise distribution of Bhutia community, 2006

District	Bhutia population	Male	Female	Percentage %	Sex ratio
North	9221	4717	4504	13.42	955
East	37818	19404	18414	55.03	949
South	14177	7255	6922	20.61	954
West	7500	3787	3713	10.9	980

Source: State Socio Economic Census, Govt. of Sikkim, 2006

Total Bhutia population in Sikkim as on 2006 is 68716, where total male population consists of 35163 (51%) and 33553 (49%) of female population. All the districts comprises of male population to be at the higher side than the females. The same picture exists in the state as a whole where male population surpasses the female population in terms of demographic profile. Bhutia's in Sikkim have the maximum settlement (55.3 % Bhutia populations) in the east district. Since east district, especially Gangtok was the last capital of Sikkim during the Chogyal so the Bhutia population also was concentrated more in this part of Sikkim. The Bhutia's of east, south and west districts have settlements along with the other communities also, but the north district has the habitations of mostly Bhutia's.

census shows that there has been not much progress in Bhutia population as compared to population of the state.

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